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I am the founder of the New Haven Votes Coalition, a nonpartisan alliance to increase voter participation and civic engagement in New Haven, and an executive committee member of the League of Women Voters - New Haven / West Haven chapter.

I would like to testify in favor of several bills today: SB 471, SB 475, HJ 114, and HB 5497.

SB 471: An Act Concerning Elections And State Voting Rights

As we watch deliberations in Washington over bills like HR 1: The John Lewis Voting Rights Act, and attempts around the country to restrict voting rights, we may be tempted to say that willful or malicious voter suppression is not a problem in Connecticut. That is generally true. But even if intentional voter suppression is not prevalent in our state, there are still bad policies and practices, some of which I have personally witnessed in New Haven, that have had the unintended effect of voter suppression or voter dilution: for example certain practices relates to EDR (New Haven has been forced to turn away over 1000 people wishing to vote by EDR since 2014); not providing enough pollworkers and resources to certain polling places that are known to regularly experience long lines and other problems; and the combining of polling places so that many residents' polling places confusingly alternate back and forth between even- and odd-number years.

Section 2 of SB 471 would create a stronger legal mechanism for identifying and implementing remedies for practices and policies at the local level that have the intended or unintended effect of voter suppression and for which there is currently no remedy. It would be reassuring to think that choosing different registrars or clerks is a sufficient form of accountability but unfortunately in some places that is simply not sufficient as an accountability mechanism, and other remedies may sometimes be needed.

Two recommendations I would make to improve the bill are: 1) An explicit requirement for translation of the text on ballots in places where there are significant language minority groups (this particularly applies when referenda are on the ballot, see my previous testimony on HB 5461); and 2) Applying the protocols for municipal redistricting plans in Lines 174-205 to all municipalities, as the current protocols in state statute for transparency in redistricting are grossly inadequate.

We should never pass up the opportunity to place voting rights on a more robust legal footing even when that might seem redundant or not of immediate, urgent concern. A CT Voting Rights Act would do that. It is unfortunate did not have this in place for the local redistricting that is taking place currently, but we should enact it now before the next round of redistricting.

SB 475: An Act Concerning Oversight Of State Agency Procurement Of Recyclable Products

Connecticut is in the middle of a waste management crisis, due to many factors, not least of which is the impending closure of MIRA. In order to address this crisis, we need to strengthen and create new end markets for recycled products of all kinds. The state's significant procurement power should be marshaled for that purpose. Any costs associated with this measure will decline over time.

HJ 114: Resolution Proposing An Amendment To The State Constitution To Permit No-excuse Absentee Voting

This is at least my seventh time testifying in favor of no-excuse absentee voting at the GAE Committee. Like others testifying today I have persisted in this Sisyphean effort because I believe it is extremely unfortunate Connecticut residents are not afforded the same basic voting conveniences that residents of three-fourths of other states already enjoy. New Haven, where I live, has an especial need for no-excuse absentee voting. November 6, 2018 marked the third election in five years in which New Haven experienced significant problems at the polls that I believe could be ameliorated by the types of expanded voting opportunities covered under this joint resolution. To their immense credit, New Haveners voted in record numbers despite widespread equipment failures with optical-scan machines rejecting wet ballots, and chaos with same-day voter registration (EDR) that made the DMV look like a model of user-friendliness and convenience. Many of these failures were, in the words of Yogi Berra, *déjà vu* all over again: in the 2016 general election, multiple polling places ran out of ballots, moderators overslept and arrived late to their stations, and the Hall of Records polling place experienced wait times exceeding three hours; and in 2014, more than 200 people wanting to vote were tragically turned away at City Hall because of excessively long lines for EDR. We are taking steps to address these recurrent problems locally with reforms to our election processes and better training for our registrars and pollworkers. However, high-turnout elections are an administrative challenge with many moving parts and there will always be unforeseen problems that arise on election

day, such as wet ballots clogging up optical-scan machines, and for New Haven, EDR which is widely used by our student population, puts enormous pressure on our election officials' time and attention, even

under the most optimal circumstances. No-excuse absentee voting would not only make casting a ballot more convenient, it would also take some of the pressure off elections officials so they

can address unexpected crises that present themselves on election day. I believe it would greatly help us in New Haven fix our issues with EDR.

In fact this is precisely what we witnessed in New Haven in 2020, as wider availability of absentee ballots due to Covid-19 made our election day much smoother than it has been in many years, and there were no problems with EDR.

Let me add that while the early voting and no-excuse absentee ballot constitutional amendment failed narrowly in a statewide referendum in 2014, it passed overwhelmingly in New Haven by a 2 to 1 margin, because New Haveners have repeatedly seen the need for it over the last decade.

In parts of the state where there was a thorough outreach and educational campaign about the true nature and purpose of the 2014 constitutional amendment, such as in New Haven, people overwhelmingly voted in favor. I believe that if this issue were on the ballot again, with the question written in an appropriate way, and with a thorough and unbiased educational and outreach campaign conducted around the amendment, it would pass easily in Connecticut, as polls have repeatedly shown that it is a reform enjoying wide bipartisan support (over 75%).

I sincerely hope this joint resolution will pass with the supermajority threshold required to advance this amendment to a ballot referendum this fall, and to give voters the opportunity to decide on this reform alongside the early voting amendment.

SB 472: An Act Concerning The Recommendations Of The Risk-limiting Audits Working Group

Along with Luther Weeks and a couple other board members of CT Citizen Election Audit, I attended some of the prototyping for the RLAs at the Secretary of State's office earlier this year and read the report from UConn. Risk-limiting audits certainly have a role in augmenting, not replacing, our current post-election audit program, but this bill needs considerably more work and review by experts before advancing to passage.

HB 5497: An Act Concerning Gender Neutrality in the CT State Constitution

New Haven enacted this reform (gender neutrality) as part of its 2013 municipal charter revision. While there was some criticism of this reform at the time, that criticism has largely subsided. Most people have come to recognize that modernizing the language in our foundational documents is a step in the right direction towards greater equity and inclusion.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on these matters.